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1918

MAN-O'-WAR RHYMES

BURT
FRANKLIN
JENNESS

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BURT FRANKLIN JENNESS

THE CORNHILL COMPANY
BOSTON

PS3519
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1918

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TO MY WIFE

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FOREWORD

You men of that unfathomed wild:
Where goes no man unreconciled
To wrestle with the destinies
Ordained upon the seven seas;
As one who holds your ills at heart,
Has lived of your strange life a part,
To you, of every clime and clan,
Here I would speak, as man to man;
Men hailed from forecastle and poop,
On yacht and schooner, bark and sloop,
On liner, merchantman and brig,
Split-s'l, cat, yawl and full-rig;
On gun-boat, cruiser, man o' war —
These simple rhymes were written for.

I would that each befitting line
Might be a tiny, lasting shrine
To all your noble, roving kind —
And to their deeds I've had in mind.
The men who've sniffed the deep sea air;
Who've braved the seas with poles stripped bare;
Who've heard the free screws pound and race;
Who've felt the salt sprays lash the face;
Who've lost the lights of shoal and beach,
And sailed where lead could never reach

The darkened slime beneath their keel;
Men who, at sea, were made to feel
The joy of rough, God-fearing times;
To them — I give my sailor rhymes.

MAN-O'-WAR RHYMES

MAN-O'-WAR RHYMES

PICTURES

I'm settin' by me ditty box, here on deck,
  The call for hammocks went, some time ago,
The for'ard battle-lantern's but a speck
  That sheds a sort o' cold and ghastly glow
Around the boys unlashin' of their rolls.
  Me old clay pipe is warm, an' glowin' red;
It's awful dark—an' through th' swayin' port-
    holes
  I c'n see th' stars a-dancin', overhead.

All hands is kind o' silent like, tonight,
  An' things is sort o' strained, both fore an' aft;
For the skipper says tomorrow'll see a fight —
  That's why it's kind o' still aboard th' craft.
Th' rookies, they've turned in, an' sleepin' sound;
  But the old timers know — an' they can't sleep;
An', half undressed, in groups, they're standin'
    'round
  A-whisperin', an' smokin' hard t' keep
Th' thoughts, that's bound t' come, from gettin'
    strong.
  You've got t' smoke 'em out, them thoughts
    that sneak

Around, for if they're shipmates very long,
They'll scurry out your little yeller streak.
We've doubled every "sub" watch on the ship,
I c'n hear th' for'ard watches' steady tread,
An' th' guard relief seems bigger, every trip —
I s'pose I oughta swing me little bed.

But, somewhow, I'm not carin' for th' sleep,
I'd ruther set an' smoke, an' smoke an' think;
If 't wa'n't so dark an' rough, I'd take a peep
Inside me box — but I'd not sleep a wink.
In th' mornin' I'll jest take th' pictures out
An' stow 'em in me blouse, before th' fight.
An' if they knock me clean out, in th' bout,
They'll find 'em, with me number, tied up tight;
An' they'll send 'em back to Anne, an' Sis an' Mother;
Then they'll know I took 'em on as fur's I could;
But if I get through th' fight somehow or other —
It's th' packet on me breast that done the good.

THE FIRE-ROOM CREW

They are fighters, but they're not the hero kind;
They are just a gang of grimy sailormen.
They're the knights of crank and lever,
They're the stoker, and the heaver;
In their little hell-hot, iron furnace den.
There's no glamor of brave deeds for them, on deck;
They are not the men who serve us at the guns.
They're the tender, and the oiler;
They're the watchman, and the toiler;
They're the nation's grubbing, sweating, plodding ones.
They're the sinew, and the brawn of fighting craft;
They are everything that goes to make up men.
But in the stoke-holes of our cruisers,
They are generally the losers,
When the hero stuff is dripping from the pen.
Not a patch of daylight cheers their realm below;
Not a ray of sunshine ever filters through;
By the furnaces, agleam, toil these master men of steam
To the music of the racing, throbbing screw.
They are not the men to choose how they shall die;
They're the servants of the throttle, and the gauge;

Twenty feet below the hatches.
They are not the kind that matches
In a throw with death, to see who pays the wage.
So while the guns of war are thundering fore and aft,
And you're shouting praise of men who fight for you,
Think of those who do their bit
In a seething furnace pit —
They're the heroes in the fire-room crew!

THE AMBULANCE CORPS

They rides with the commissary behind,
And the combat-train before.
The why-don't-ye-join-the-army kind,
They calls the ambulance corps.
They're the butt o' the jokes along th' line,
These ne'er -do-wells of war;
Poor showin' they makes, where the reg'lars shine—
But they earns the pay they draw.
They drills with a stretcher, instead of a gun,
And their pack's a tin canteen.
Their duty begins when the fightin' is done —
They're kind o' betwixt an' between
Th' staff an' the reg'lars, as to style,
A sort o' half-soldierin' crew —
But they serves alike, the rank an' file,
An' the duty they has to do,
It's piecin' together us wounded guys —
An' they're good enough soldiers then —
They ain't cut out just reg'lar-wise,
But all th' same, they're men.
For they gives us a lift when we falls behind —
It's hell when a soldier gets old —
An' after the action is over, they find
The guys out there in th' cold —

An' they gives 'em a drink when their throats is
dry
An' they plugs 'em where they're sore,
An' they brings 'em in, when they're left t' die —
The boys o' the ambulance corps.

THE CALL

I'm sitting at dusk in the firelight;
The children climb up on my knee;
The wife bids them kiss me good night;
All this — yet my thoughts are at sea.
Not the uncertain sea of our dreaming;
Not the billows of fortune or fate;
Where the white sails of fancy are gleaming —
Not the sea of fantastic estate;
But the bucking old combers, foam crested,
With a trough you'd get lost in, between;
Where Nature nor Man ever rested,
And you lived every day that you've seen.
The sea that's unfathomed, mysterious;
The sea that is awful, and real;
Where sailing's a business so serious
That the nearness of death you can feel.
You see, I'm not wholly to blame
For this feeling that's in me tonight —
That when the two little ones came
To kiss me — my thoughts were in flight;
For I'm an old-timer — you've guessed it —
An' I'm longing, so keen, to go back,
In a jiffy, I s'pose, I'd confessed it —
But, there I am, off on a tack.
You see, I'm too old for a deck-hand.

I'm a naval reserve, on half pay;
But I'd sort o', somehow, half reckoned
I'd get to the war, some way.
But my application's rejected;
The papers just came back today;
It's not quite the deal I'd expected —
Yet I haven't a word to say.
But you'll understand 'bout the firelight,
And the children who wait at my knee,
And the kisses they gave me tonight —
How they brought back my thoughts from the sea.

THE CENSOR

Whether in a nation's crisis,
Or in life, we would surmount
The difficulties — spare advices;
It's the deeds, not words, that count.

When the war clouds start to gather,
And the talk of strife begins,
It is not the thing we'd rather
Do, but what we should, that wins.

When there's trouble on the border,
And "preparedness" fills the air,
It is silence, law and order,
That are wanted most down there.

If your patriotic fervor
Kindles fires you can't resist.
Cease to be a calm observer
On the side lines — and enlist.

But don't criticise the helmsmen
Of our gallant ship of state,
If a storm of doubt o'erwhelms, then
Stand by the craft — and wait.

If you think her course unsteady —
Fear she'll never reach the land,
Don't megaphone your views — get ready;
Clear for action! Lend a hand!

If your country's flag is trailing
In an ignominious dust,
Don't let duty find you failing,
Die, to raise it — if you must.

But when paths of peace you're walking,
Keep the censorship on tight —
For the man who does the talking
Seldom is the man — to fight.

OUR UNION

The Stars and Stripes o'er land and sea
Shall stand for life and liberty.
Never shall they trail the dust;
Never shall our sabres rust;
Defending when and where we must,
The ensign of our country.

America divides the seas
And stands between the monarchies.
A union of the free-born states;
A union which oppression hates;
A land which never tolerates
The ban of human liberties.

Born beneath oppression's heel;
Welded by the sabres' steel;
Builded in the wilderness;
Reared in want and barrenness,
Religious toil, and social stress —
In blood our country set its seal.

Blessed union of the free;
Emblem of democracy;
Land to stir a patriot's pride;
Land where freedom's sons abide,
Through the blood of those who died
For justice and humanity.

THE WELCOME

Return of the 1st Expeditionary Force, 1916

There's a whisper on the west-wind, there's a murmur in the air;
There are smiles and gentle nodding in the crowded thoroughfare;
There's a fluttering of bunting, and the flags are flying free;
There's a spirit of home-coming; there are signs of jubilee.
There's a feast prepared for some one; there's a latch string out today;
There's a hearty western welcome — in a simple western way;
There's the feeling of good fellows, when they gather round the board;
There's a speech of mellow friendship, stronger than the spoken word.
Familiar faces, tanned and ruddy 'neath the tilted brims appear;
Familiar figures, khaki clad, are greeting old acquaintance here —
Thread their way, content, among us; stop, to grasp a friendly hand;
Familiar voices mingle freely in the tongue of their own land,

For a dust brown van has halted, rank and file,
within our gates;
They are standing at our hearth-stone for the welcome that awaits.
Let the spirit of our city, from the rock-ribbed
Franklin's dome
To the shining Rio Grande, welcome Pershing's
army home!

THE ENGINEERS

There's some as likes th' infantry,
An' roasts their bloomin' feet —
There's some prefers th' cavalry,
An' sets th' darby seat;
There's some as hits th' limber train,
T' fight behind th' line;
But, friend, when I sign up again,
— Th' Engineers fer mine!

Th' doughboys drills th' best, I 'low,
An' fights like they's in hell;
Th' mounts is best when there's a row
Where hikin's not so swell;
Artillerymen don't never fail
T' cover from th' rears —
But fer a gang t' blaze th' trail,
Give me th' Engineers!

"SIGNAL BILL"

'T was what ye'd call a nasty night,
An' 'twa'n't no time to pick a fight,
  Th' night we struck th' zone.
Th' fog wuz settlin' purty thick —
Screws 'u'd race, an' buck, an' kick,
  An' stays 'u'd creak an' groan.

A crew at every three-inch gun,
An' all han's keyed up fer th' run —
  Wuz how we cruised that night.
I tuk th' wheel — I'd never had
A taste o' war — wuz jest a lad —
  But I had shipped t' fight.

An' soon ol' quartermaster Bill
An' me made friends, as seamen will,
  Without much else t' do,
An' Bill wuz on th' bridge that night,
T' kinda see that things went right,
  An' sort o' visit, too.

Sez Bill: "Ye know it ain't a fight
That's gettin' on me nerves tonight,
  But I guess ye'll agree
That I have kinda wronged me kid,
Fer when th' mother died, I did
  Th' getaway t' sea."

"An' I h'ain't never heard," sez Bill, —
"An' reckon now I never will —
As how th' brat come through,
Fer I've a feelin', lad, tonight,
An' ef I'm calculatin' right,
I want t' ask ef you

Will be a father — ef —" sez he,
"Ef — what I'm thinkin' of, should be —
To that-there kid o' mine."
I promised Bill I'd do my best,
Then eased a point, Sou-west b' West,
T' fetch 'er in ter line,

When, "GOD!" Sez Bill; "LOOK! Port 'er quick!"
An' pointed where th' fog hung thick
Jest off th' starb'rd bow.
'Bout then th' lookout yelled; an' aft
"All Hands" wuz sounded through th' craft;
An' then, someway — somehow

We lifted like a surf-borne skiff;
Then hung an' trembled; straightened stiff;
An' settled by th' stern.
I struck th' binnacle an' hung
Until a list t' starb'rd flung
Me with an awful turn,

An' I brought up ferninst a hatch —
'N' through th' fog I leaped, t' catch
A piece o' deck-house frame.
I heard Bill yell, an' like a streak
Seen 'im shoot by —an' then th' creak
O' life-boat tackle came.

Th' Cap'n's voice by megaphone;
Th' siren's blasts; a shriek — a groan;
Th' hiss o' boiler steam;
Th' crash o' superstructure gear;
Th' gurgle o' th' water — near —
An' then, I 'spect, a dream —

Fer I don't recollect th' rest,
Till, half awake, across th' breast
O' "Signal Bill" I rolled.
— An' there, aboard a life-raft, sprawled
Two men — like they'd washed up — er crawled
An' one wuz stark an' cold.

ALOHA

Honolulu, fairest gem in your ocean diadem,
To your island pearls, you bring the brightest lustre of the string.
Resting place amid the sea, like a wayside hostelry,
Where we linger in content, to and from the Orient.
How we love your glistening sands, and the semi-tropic strands
Of your palm-spread Waikiki, there to bask, beside the sea;
Love your reef-bound, restless bay, where the angry channel spray,
Breaking on a shoal met tide, dashes on the liner's side;
Love to watch the shining skins of your agile dock urchins,
Seeking, in your crystal bay, coins the tourists cast away;
Love your wonderland, and more — love its customs, and its lore —
Its traditions, too, but — Ah! How we love your word Aloha!
Aloha! How its charms enthrall! Soft and luring, like a call

To a new Utopia. Never greeting like Aloha
Met the traveller before! Taking leave of foreign shore,
Alien heart could never yearn, gentler bidding to return.
How the native tongues give full measure to each syllable;
Monotones, the sweetest yet, falling from the alphabet;
Never land adopted speech that could harmonize with each
Chord of sympathy, and, through salutation or adieu,
Like Aloha, tenderly speak to us across the sea.

THE REFUGEE

A weary traveller stopped to pass the time,
A pilgrim, bent and old and sad and worn.
His haggard face besmeared with smoke and grime,
His shabby cloak was crimson stained and torn.

His eyes were wild and restless, as a dove
Pressed before the hunter's eager chase.
Gone was all the light of human love —
Grim and terror stricken, was his face.

And when I asked him whither journeyed he,
How far away the tavern that he sought,
He raised his frightened eyes and looked at me —
Bowed his head again, and answered not.

Then he wept the bitter tears of harried souls —
Till I thought the flood of anguish ne'er would cease.
"O'er the world a wave of conflict rolls,"
He cried, "and I must flee, for I am PEACE."

LET THE SEA GIVE ANSWER!

O sea, whose laughing waves, with lips afoam,
  Content, have tossed the dark æons through;
You whom every race has called its home,
  Speak, and tell us what it means to you:

The smoke screens, which your fair vistas blot;
  The death engines which plough your emerald
    deep,
And in your leagues of utter darkness plot
  The lives of innocents while they sleep?

Your waves which used to sport themselves in
    play
  Are torn by screaming shells and stained with
    blood.
Your tides like funeral coteries bear away
  And cast ashore your slain with every flood.

The tortured skies above you look aghast
  Upon your bosom, torn by war and strewn with
    dead.
At the struggling on your wreckage, and the vast
  Uncounted treasure sinking to your bed.

Can you forget these scenes, and once again
  Will your splendid billows laughingly
Kiss the bows of peaceful merchantmen?
  With their flags of commerce flying free

Will they return to ply the paths of trade?
  Can you lure again the happy traveller,
And will he seek your beauties unafraid,
  Or shrink, as one within a giant sepulchre?

A PRAYER

Forgive the crimes, O Lord, by madmen's hands—
Forgive the carnage wrought in many lands —
Where up to Thee their battle smokes have curled —
And pity, we beseech Thee, a war-torn world.
Stay, O Lord, the reaper's crimson yield —
Forgive, if in the hearts of those who wield
The blades of war, are thoughts of greed and power —
Put forth Thy hand and rule an epic hour!

In camp and trench, in air and on the sea,
We commend our armies, Lord, to Thee.
Watch over our beloved and distant ones —
Spare them from the harvest of the guns.
Calm, O Lord, the wrath of storm-wracked seas —
Rid Thy splendid oceans of the treacheries
Of war — and, till Thy waves shall laugh again,
Protect, O God, from harm, our sailormen.

A GALLEY YARN

Oleson was our Bo's'n's mate, an' a better mate than he,
Nor a stubborner cuss, as I cal'late, has never put to sea.

He hailed from the shores o' Skagerack — some say 't was the ice an' snow
That froze his heart an' warped his back, up there, long ago.

Ole was seasoned, from peak t' keel, an' strong as a tops'l yard.
Of sentiment, though, he lacked a good deal — for his heart and his head was hard.

His home used t' be on every sea, his mates of every skin;
He'd sailed with the Jap an' yaller Chinee, Scandinavian, an' Finn.

But one kind o' mate, did the bo's'n hate, — as near as I can figger —
An' t' hear him relate, his one curse o' fate, was sailin' with a nigger.

Now we had a cook, who couldn't look at the mate
without it riled him,
An' it seemed that cook, the more we took his
part, the more it spiled him;

For of all the brew that ever a crew was asked to
put inside 'em,
I'll tell you 't was the greasy stew that nigger set
beside 'em.

One day there hit that cook a fit of temper, an'
the cussin'
In the galley brought to it the mate, who heard
the fussin' —

The nigger heard the bo's'n's word, an' told him
not to meddle.
Then in a jiff we saw him biff the bo's'n with a
leddle.

The mate he knew where the wooly grew, an'
fastened his fingers in it;
That nigger yelled, but Oleson held on tighter
every minute.

The lid was off a kittle of broth, an' they spilt
nigh half, I reck;
It doused the cook an' the bo's'n both, as they
rolls on the galley deck.

Now Ole knew they'd spilt the brew, an quicker'n
I have said it,
Right through an' through that congealed stew,
he souses the cook that made it.

'Twas plain to see, that Sambo Lee was thinkin'
of other regions
That 'ud better be, for such as he, an' them —
without Norwegians.

So down on his knees in the puddle o' grease he
drops an' begins t' holler;
But the mate didn't ease, an' I saw him seize that
nigger by the collar.

Now the rest o' the stew was near by, too, an' the
stuff was cold an' clammy;
So he ups the tureen an' lets it dreen, on what was
left of Sammy.

Then he grabs that cook right by the neck an'
swings him 'round the galley
An' to show his respec', he wallops the deck, an'
throws him into th' alley.

Wal, cooks there's be'n, an' cooks there'll be, but
I reckon, black or white,
A 'umbler one ye'll never see than cooked for us
that night.

An' from that day, too, if the grub we drew wa'n't
quite th' right complexion,
We'd happen to say, up Sambo's way — "The
bos'n's on inspection."

A SENTRY'S SOLILOQUY

BORDER PATROL

From my lonely post I gaze through the distant, purple haze,
Where the rockies bare their peaks before the West;
Sometimes out across the mesa, stretching East, my eyes will wander,
And there comes to me a strange and sad unrest.
For, beyond the arid reaches of those million-acred plains,
Lies the land my heart is yearning for again;
Lies the homeland, bright and cheery, far away across the dreary
Desert lands—and the yearning brings me pain.
Out here the hearts are true, and the skies are bluest blue,
And the welcome of the West is in the air.
Here, the spirit of the wild roams as free as laughing child,
And the men are not afraid to do and dare.
Here, the twilight may be longer, and the friendships may be stronger,
But no grandeur underneath the Western skies
Can stay the tears, or stop the aching, when a lonely heart is breaking —
No handclasp can sever the old home ties.

Though the alien hills unfold the sweetest secrets
they may hold;
No fields Elysian on the face of God's green
earth;
No lure of rancho, camp or grange, no wild free-
dom of the range,
Can ever wean us from the land which gave us
birth.

I am dying for the sighing of the pines on home-
land hills;
For the fragrance of the balsam and the fir.
Just to walk knee-deep in clover; just to go back
and live over
Once again, the happy summer days that were.
Just to seek some ferny glen; flush the drumming
grouse, again;
Wade the trout stream where the speckled
beauties leap;
Just to hear the spinning reel; 'round the mossy
banks to steal;
And lure the wily pickerel from the weedy deep;
Just to paddle up the river, at the twilight hour
again,
When the woodland world is listening, and still;
Just to hear the frogs in chorus pipe their glad-
some evening song;
And calling home its wandering mate, the
whip-poor-will.

THE STRETCHER-BEARERS

When the stress of battle is ended,
And the merciful shades of night,
Like an artist's brush have blended
The horrors of war from sight;

When the tortured skies are clearing
The mists of their leaden rain,
And the blood-red stars are leering
Through at a field of slain;

When the blasphemed air is bearing
The stench of fresh shed blood,
And the dead lie stark, and staring
Up from the steaming mud;

Ah, that is a glorious hour,
For a corps of unenvied men,
Who never shrink or cower,
Are doing their duty then.

Out there in the solemn night,
Alone, with the dying and dead —
Swiftly, after the fight
The stretcher-bearers tread.

THE DIFFERENCE

When a fellow's up against it,
And he hasn't got a cent,
And his shabby clothes belie him
For a high-toned gent;
Then his friends will, ordinary,
Hand him out the stony stare;
For the hard-luck down-and-outer
Isn't wanted anywhere.

But I've been thinkin' of the difference
In the way they treat a guy
When he's all got up in khaki,
And he's ready for to die.
When the bugles start to blowin',
Then life don't seem quite so raw;
For a hobo is a hero,
When he's leavin' for the war.

THE ARMY MULE

I've rode Kentucky thoroughbreds,
An' Derbyshire mounts.
I've jockeyed for the royal heads,
An' raced for dukes an' counts.
I've broncho busted on the plain —
Know every trick an' rule
Of every beast that draws a rein —
— Except the Army mule.

It's my delight to rope a steer,
I've broken colts galore,
I've seen the wild herds buck an' rear,
A thousand head or more.
In fancy horseflesh I've a pride,
But where I play the fool
Is in the barrick-yard astride
That on'ry Army mule.

THE CAVALRY

It's up with the leather,
We're riding together.
It's blow Boots an' Saddles.
Ho! Ho! Boots an' Saddles!
In foul or fair weather
The troop is afield.

It's stirrup an' straddle,
The pack strap an' saddle,
With mounts neck an' neck, Oh!
The hoofs, how they echo!
It's up an' skeedaddle,
The troop is afield.

O life in the service!
The praise you deserve is
In cavalry troopin'
The dashin' — the whoopin' —
The cavalryman's nerve is
The keenest, afield.

Boots 'n' Saddles, they say,
Is the gent that 'll pay
All your chits an' your debts —
All your wagers an' bets —
So it's up an' away!
The troop is afield.

THE NATIONAL ARMY

When the Top-Sergeant's grouchy an' outs with a curse
At the mud on your leggins; or, what's even worse,
One shoe is your bunkie's an' one of 'em ain't—
Don't fall down in ranks, for a soldier don't faint,
Jest come to attention, with eyes to the front;
Your legs'll support you — you may think they won't —
It's ninety more days that they'll wallup you through,
Buck up, for they're makin' a reg'lar of you.

When the Corp'ral has drilled you until your poor spine
Is limp as a gun rag, don't whimper or whine;
Jest hitch up your belt for supportin' your chest,
An' "Shoulder!" an' "Carry!" 'n' "Present!" with the rest.
When the chow is all bad, from the prunes to the spud,
The soup is like water — the coffee like mud;
You're gettin' your pay — an' experience, too,
They're makin' a regular reg'lar of you!

THE SEA

There's a space as high as Heaven; there's a place
as deep as hell;
There's a chunk of shining blue that lies between;
There's an endless, treadless way where men meet
and pass, unknown —
It's the nearest place to God you've ever seen.

Stretching out between horizons, with a starlit
dome above,
There's a deep, dark, treacherous waste that lies
below;
It is neither earth nor sky, and we know not
whence nor why —
But it's there — and fitly, God has willed it so.

It's the boundless, untamed sea, flowing down
from pole to pole;
It's a wilderness that thrills you through and
through;
Where hordes of nature's hidden forces thunder
'round your puny soul;
It's a trail that cuts the universe in two.

It is propping up the heavens, lest the constella-
tions fall;
It is straining at the shores of East and West;
It is tempering the climes, from the glistening
polar rimes
To the burning tropic trades that never rest.

There are men who love it better than the best
land in creation —
And for aught that we can say, it's just as old.
It has lured men on for ages, tender youth and
wisest sages,
As the North has lured men on to grub for gold.

Bitter, cold, and unresponsive as a stark dead
thing of hope,
More relentless than the ghosts of want and woe;
It has seen men bow before it; writhe and curse,
despair and die —
To be cast into utter depths below.

Yet men have frozen, starved and plundered for
the life they wouldn't trade;
In silence suffered all the torments of the deep:
Seen their fevered bones decay; picked the scur-
vied flesh away;
Faced their God — and prayed the night would
bring them sleep.

They, the men who've seen the worst; be it fam-
ine, plague, or thirst;
They that harken to the wild — would have it so.
It's the life! The lure! The goal! The wander-
lust that grips the soul —
And when they hear the sea a-calling, — they
must go!

THE VERDICT

"I'm waitin' for trial tomorrow;
Drunk when on duty's the charge,
An' I'm locked in this 'castle' o' sorrow
— Not even a prisoner at large.
It's a 'General,' an' all that goes with it —
Gold lace, an' side-arms, an' such;
If it wa'n't for the rank an' the pith it
Means, I wouldn't mind it so much.
I'm guilty as hell, an' they know it,
'T ain't much use t' make a defence.
They'll think it's a bluff, but I'll throw it,
— I know it's my second offence.
But it wasn't my watch, t' begin with,
I was only the mornin' relief;
Came aboard with the bunch I had been with,
At midnight — an' then came to grief.
Was ordered on anchor watch duty
T' relieve a poor guy who was sick.
Jag? Yes, I had a beauty,
But I stood up as straight as a stick,
Saluted, an' started up for'ard,
When the stuff sort o' went to my head,
An' I pitched in the scuppers, t' starb'ard,
So drunk that they thought I was dead.
I'm a long timer, too, in this outfit,
Four years — an old salt, you will say;

Jest a month more to do, an' then I'd quit
With a snug little pile laid away.
Came in on that wave o' preparedness,
Thought I would jest take a look
At the world, an' then somehow a madness
Jest swept me along like a brook.
A madness for life an' adventure—
For a fling on the great open sea,
Where you're free from the world's petty censure,
An' can work out your own destiny.
Where you buck against lives in the makin',
Where men are hewed out o' the rough
An' the timber is strained to the breakin'
—An' will break (or it's damned good stuff).
Where the bigness o' the universe awes you,
Till you feel like a helpless child;
(Yet the thought of returnin' abhors you),
An' your soul is lost in the wild.
O God! how I loathed to abide it!
How I've cursed the first day that I came!
I've scoffed at the men who must ride it,
But I love the old sea just the same —
From the great purple rim that surrounds it
To the rainbow hues of the dome.
The mysterious life that abounds it;
It's wild, I know, but it's home!
I know I've been sort of a rounder,
With cards, an' women, an' booze,

But I've known a philosophy sounder:
I know what it means to lose
The things that will satisfy cravin',
When the heart is a-hunger inside;
The things that keep a man slavin',
And shore up his totterin' pride;
That will lift him up out o' the mire
An' give him the guts to fight,
An' set his ambitions afire, —
The things that will keep a man right:
A home, with the firelight glowin',
A welcome that comes from the heart;
Some one to care where you're goin',
An' bid you Godspeed when you start.
Good will, that you don't have to borrow,
Friends, that you can't buy or sell.
I must write to the old folks tomorrow,
— An' maybe, a word — to Nell.
The court! I forgot! an' me schemin'
How soon I'd be quittin' this pack;
But a year as a striper! I'm dreamin'!
— I'd be too damned low to go back.
I s'pose it's a year at hard labor,
I guess it's the lock-step for mine,
Or a cell, with a guard for a neighbor,
Or, maybe, it's both — with a fine.
I'm feelin' as weak as a kitten;
Three days bread an' water, I reck'.
Well, they don't make a guy very fittin':
— I'll jest lay down on the deck.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

"'Acquittal,' you say I am ratin'?
— Oh, that's a mistake, I expect;
— ' Circumstances were extenuatin' ?'
"Well, somethin' to that effect."

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

"Wonder if Nell is still carin' . . .
— What would the old folks have said? . . .
— I'll go back to 'em now — God sparin',
An' live like a man — till I'm dead." . . .

THE FLARE-BACK

So they won't ship me over today, eh?
  Too old, did ye say, an' too lame?
It's a hard knock, Cap'n, t' go 'way
  An' know ye're clean out o' th' game.
That scar? Aye, Sir, it's a bad un;
  Kind o' cripples th' leg some, I know.
Duty? Aye, Sir, 't was a mad gun,
  Back in 'ninety. Wal, Cap'n, I'll go.

The story? Wal, now, Sir, ye're kind.
  Set here, ye say? Thank ye, I will.
Seems good t' us old uns ter find
  A "striper" who's kind t' us still.
Wal, Sir, you'll remember, I reckon,
  When th' Ranger put in with her dead,
Night after her quarter-deck gun,
  (Twelve-inch) run amuck in th' head.

You don't? Wal, Sir, may God spare you
  Sich a sight as I saw there that day,
And th' hell that I lived through there, too,
  That night in Pensacola Bay.
The Ranger wuz out fer a record
  At target manœuvres that spring.
She wuz hittin', Sir, too, an' I 'spect 'u'd
  'A' won it clean — but fer one thing.

Our pride wuz th' quarter-deck turret;
I wuz pointin' fer gun number four.
"Black Baby," we called her, an', Sir, it
Seemed like she knew it — an' more.
Wal, 't was long about dusk uv a Friday,
We'd only a run more t' go.
An', Sir, I've seen gun crews in my day;
I've seen 'em that's fast, an' that's slow.

But, Gad! Sir, them lads wuz a-heavin'
Five hundred pound shell t' th' breech,
S' fast that th' lock wuz nigh seethin'
— An', Gad! How th' Baby 'u'd screech!
Wal, we steamed on th' range f'r th' last run,
S' dark I c'u'd skeerce see th' raft.
"More speed on th' starb'd aft gun,"
Wuz th' word that th' Cap'n sent aft.

An', my God! not a man there c'u'd answer,
(Ye'll 'scuse my expressin' things so)
But th' crew wuz struck dumb to a man, Sir,
'S if death sent the message below.
The place wuz s' plumb-full o' silence
Ye c'u'd cut the air, Sir, with a knife,
An' somethin' gripped us like a sentence,
When th' Judge is condemnin' a life.

Wal, they loaded, then gazed at each other,
An' stood there, froze stark to th' gun;
Er fingered their throats like they'd smother,
— Then th' siren blew twice fer th' run,

An' th' bugle blast sounded fer firin.'
Wal, that crew, Sir, wuz off like a shot;
Black as a stoker, perspirin',
Rammin' her home when she's hot,

Receivin', an' shovin', an' primin',
(Stripped t'th' waist they wuz, stark.)
Lockin' th' breech, an' no timin',
"Steady, now," "Ready," an' "Mark."
We'd found th' spot, too, Sir, wuz makin'
A string that 'ud do th' craft proud.
Faster, th' breech-lock wuz breakin'
An' closin' — no heed o' th' cloud

O' th' blasphemous stuff from th' muzzle,
Chokin', but shovin' her down,
Makin' th' "Black Baby" guzzle
Th' lead, an' th' smokeless "brown."
God knows, Sir, how long we wuz steamin',
But we'd made nigh a half o' th' run,
When o' sudden, I thought I wuz dreamin',
An' sailin' straight inter th' sun.

A million stars seemed t' be flashin',
An' then: O my God, what a roar!
Like shriekin' worlds fallin' an' crashin'
— Then I didn't know nuthin' more
Till a lantern gleam 'woke me, an' turnin —
(It couldn't be worse, Sir, in hell)

There, a mass o' charred flesh, an' still burnin',
Wuz our crew, in a heap, where they fell.

Ye can talk o' the sights in the trenches,
But th' hauntin' o' dead in that hole,
The shrieks o' the dyin'; the stenches;
They stab, Sir, ter yer very soul.
Stripped, like a derelict hulk; dead,
Th' Lieutenant lay, shy o' both legs,
I wuz jammed agin th' after bulkhead,
With th' rammer shaft piled on my pegs.

Kind o' felt so, at first, they wuz missin',
But a couple there looked like my own,
In th' rags, though, I saw somethin' glisten,
— 'Twas a part o' my own shin bone.
Wal, that's 'bout th' heft o' th' tale, Sir,
'Cept I'm all that was left o' th' crew.
Gad! But you look a bit pale, Sir,
Don't mind what I've said — an' I'm through.

Ye're better now, Sir, I'll be goin';
I'll git along somehow, I 'spect.
A waiver, ye say? that's a-showin' —
What! fer me, Sir, my age an' defect?
Ye'll 'scuse me 'f I seem a bit soft, Sir;
I'll jes' wipe these old eyes s' I can
See your face: Oh, I know ye're an off'cer,
But, By God! Sir, ye're more — ye're a man!

THE OLD GUN DECK

Remember, boys, the old gun deck
And the good times we had there?
The hammocks swinging neck and neck,
The mischief in the air
When "taps" had gone, and silently
We tucked in snug and warm,
Till "jimmy-legs" sneaked up to see
Each hammock's rounded form.
When all was still and lights were out
And "jimmy-legs" had gone,
Remember how we'd prance about
And talk till nearly dawn?
How we raved and vowed and swore
We'd never ship again,
And how we longed to go ashore
And live like other men.
And when a draft of rookies came,
Right off the farm "By Heck,"
Remember we upheld the name
Of that old gun deck?
We lashed their hammocks, bow and stern,
We shifted billets, too.
We gave them every chance to learn
What sailors ought to do.

Remember how, at reveille,
We'd try to steal a nap?
Till Hanz, the bos'n's mate, would see,
And rouse us with a slap,
Then the old "square-head" would yell:
"Uup you, now, all han's,"
And from the galley'd come the smell
Of bacon in the pans.
And when the mess was spread again,
And cleaned up, every speck,
The smoking lamp was lit, and then
We'd scrub the old gun deck.
You recollect, that day in port,
The old deck shone like glass,
When every jack was paying court,
And dancing with his lass?
And how the old piano sang,
And how each roguish glance
And gentle touch, and voice that rang,
Would thrill us in the dance?
And, boys, that night when all was still,
(You won't dispute, I reck,)
The little god that shoots to kill,
Shot up that whole gun deck.

Oh, how we loathed the old routine,
And how we cursed it, then;
But, boys, each day of service seen
Has made us better men.

The days we longed for then, are here,
Those days we thought so free,
Each dream of things we held so dear,
Is now reality.
No "jimmy-legs" to rouse us, now,
No reveille at dawn,
No messmates' ringing laughter — how
We miss them, now they're gone —
Ah! Boys, what treasured friendships then,
How sweet if we could beck
The past, and find our berths again,
On the old gun deck.

THE BOAT RACE

D'ye hear that, Bill? She's called away!
Do we guys work on racin' day?
Well, say! Y' know yer Uncle Ben,
He ain't the kind what's workin' when
The candy crew o' this whole fleet
Is out in racin' trim t' beat
The "Pensy's" high-falut'n crew,
Champeens of Division Two.

Come on, Bill, now chuck the grind.
Shine that bright work in y' mind,
Er pass th' word t' that marine,
Let him squeegee decks an' clean.
Tell 'im th' bo's'n left th' word
T' scrub the foc's'le, you heard.
Come on, Bill, up with th' bunch,
Y' know I've kinda got a hunch
Our boys'll win that race today,
And I 've got coin what talks that way.

Say, Bill, I've seen that gang a-rowin'.
Course that's th' only way o' knowin'
The stuff that's in a race boat's crew,
An', say, I'm here t' break t' you
The news, that them Division kids
Can't git a race boat off th' skids,

Side o' our crew, 'n' here's the green
What says we'll swipe the "Pensy" clean.
Here they come! Jest pipe th' way
Our lads are showin' up today.
See "Skinny" Hazeltine, an' "Hank,"
An' "Bunny" Olcott, Bill, he drank
Enough las' night ter finish him,
But "Bunny" 's right in racin' trim.
See "Fatty" Brown, an' there is "Hoke,"
He looks like he could pull a stroke.
An' little Tim, the coxs'n, he
C'n steer anythin' 'at goes t' sea.
If any man in this outfit
C'n keep a racin' course — he's it.

The for'ard turret, that's th' place
T' see the start o' this big race,
An' mebbe we can land a bet
Or two, on this performance, yet.
There's th' stake boats cruisin' round,
Th' judges' launch is on th' ground.
An' — yes, there comes th' lubbers now!
Look! th' way they pull that scow,
Ketchin' crabs with every stroke,
'N' their backs 'r' bent like they was broke.
Hey! You lad! I've got a ten
T' stake on old Kentucky's men!
'Make it twenty?' 't's a go!
Anythin' t' please, y' know!

More? Why sure, just send 'em round
Ter th' same old campin' ground,
Me an' Bill has got th' wealth!
— You must be bettin' for your health,
That tub o' yours could never win,
This here sea's a bit too thin
Fer them lads t' be rowin' in.
Th' place fer them guys t' begin
An' end their racin' days in boats,
— Er any other craft that floats,
Is scullin' 'round, until they're faint,
In catamarans, t' scrub an' paint
Th' side, an' not be posin' for
A racin' crew, o' man o' war.

Say, Bill, they're off right now! an' gee!
Them candy kids has took th' lee,
Jest like Tim Hanan said they'd do.
Aw! Set down, we can't see through
You lads. Say, Bill, lend me ten?
Them guys is flashin' coin again.
Gainin'? Sure, they're walkin' now
Abaft the lumberin' lubbers' bow.

"Ten on 'Pensy'!" "Taken here!!"
"Shove off there, make that coin appear."
"Ra! Ra! — Ra! Ra! Ken-tuck-y!"
We're half a length ahead, Bill, see!

"Hey! There 'Pensy!' Get a net
Y' might ketch 'em faster yet!"
"Aw, go tell it th' marines!
Money talks — Jest flash th' greens!"
"'Yankee — doodle — keep it up!'"
"Hi! Hi! 'Pensy' — Navy yup!"
"Ahoy! Kentucky, dingey there!
Y' ain't got a mile t' spare!
Throw that stroke oar overboard!
Listen t' th' coxs'n's word!
Together — now — one — two!"
"Pipe down! You, lad, they'll come through!"
"Hi! Yi! — Hi! Yi! — Yi! Yi! — Yi! Yi!"
"'Pensy!' 'Pensy!' 'Pensy!' Try!"

Aw, Bill! Them bums are comin' up,
They're comin' like a frighted pup —
"Pull, you spalpeens! Pull, I say!
Th' stake 's a hundred yards away."
They're round th' buoy — a length behind!
Aw, Bill! Them scrubs are losin' — mind?
"'Pensy!' 'Pensy!' 'Pensy!' Hi!
We'll put old Kentucky by.
'Take — me — back — to old — Kentucky!'"
Gee! Bill, them hounds are lucky!
"Pull Kentucky! On th' run!"
"Aw! Shoot 'em from a twelve inch gun,
They can't pull a rowin' race."
"Hey, you, lad, right here's th' place

Fer any coin what's gettin' cold,
'Pensy' 'll cover all y' hold."
"Ketch 'em with a boat hook there!"
"See 'em gaspin' now fer air!"

Aw, Bill, you lubber, can't yer yell?
"KENTUCKY! Pull there! Pull like — well,"
Bill, — Aw, what's the use! But, say,
We'll go ashore next racing day.

THE DESERTER

From the Arctic floes, to the Antipodal snows, the men who follow the sea
Strange secrets hold, strange tales have told, but the strangest was told to me
By a sailor who lay, as I passed one day through the wards of St. Helene,
On his cot of white, and a sadder sight than he, I've never seen.

His gray locks lay on a brow of clay, and his dim eyes were sunken in.
He was an aged man — an American, far from home and kin.
On a broken chair near by, there lay his tobacco and pipes.
And draped on the bed, just over his head, was a flag of the Stars and Stripes.

The Sister said, as we neared his bed: "I know he will welcome you so,
For he raves at night, and sees in his fright, the scenes of long ago."
Then his eyes grew bright, and he sat upright, but his gaze seemed far away.
And he bowed his head at some things he said as he told his story that day.

"You'll think it queer, that I should here unfold
this tale," he said,
"It's a story of pride — and a man who died" —
then he touched the flag o'er his head.
"A Man O' War lay, in Frisco bay, and I was one
of her crew.
The red blood of youth coursed my veins, and,
forsooth, the red liquor ran there, too.

"I drifted one night, where the lights were bright,
and the harlots played their game.
I was drunk as hell, and I couldn't tell a blush of
rouge from shame.
And the lines of sin might well have been the
furrows wrought by care;
For in passion's light, at the dead of night, the
jade looked passing fair.

"She pleaded with me to set her free from the
bondage of men and sin;
To lift her above a hireling's love, and the mire
she'd sunken in.
And the bold pretext of the woman got next to
my whisky sodden heart,
And the story she told took a terrible hold, — and
I believed — at least in part.

"So I answered her, yes, and married — I guess,
(God knows by what code, law or rule)
And the very next day, I took her away, and de-
serted my ship — like a fool.

On the Chilian coast, we made the most of a
gold grubber's simple fare,
And I shared my life with this kind of wife in a
shack we builded there.

"The old life had grown stale,and I quit the bright
trail, when this woman came into my life.
And, by Heaven, I swear, I gave her the care and
devotion of any wife.
And so grateful she seemed, and her eyes so
gleamed with something more than desire,
That I thought the whole of a woman's soul
had consumed the carnal fire.

"Then we quarreled one night, when the lantern
light in the shack was burning low.
She was tired of life, she said, as a wife, and I
guess what she said was so.
I knew, for a spell, she'd been false as hell, and I
I took her to task for her deeds;
Then she raved 'round the shack, and swore she'd
go back where men didn't question her
creeds.

"So I spoke of the gold we'd hoarded, and told the
woman, as partners, we
Would play the game fair, and the stuff we'd
share, ere we parted company.

Then I saw her go, so silent and slow, to the room
we'd called our own,
And the air grew chill, and 't was deathly still and
I shivered, and waited, alone.

"The shadows hung low, and the lantern's glow
looked down with a ghastly grin,
While round the shack, through window and crack
the cold was creeping in.
Then a rustle I heard, and with never a word she
came through the shadowy gloom,
And I saw she was dressed in her tawdry best, and
groomed, as women groom.

"Her manner was bold, and I thought of the gold,
so I stepped between her and the door.
Then a sting in my back — the room grew black—
and I don't remember more
Till they found me next day, in the blood where I
lay, and brought me to St. Helene.
The woman, she must have piked out with the
dust, for neither has since been seen."

Then he turned and laid bare his back, and there
across the shrunken spine,
Was an ugly scar that reached so far as a sabre
might design.

Then he lifted high each withered thigh, and
dropped it helplessly.
And he turned his head, as he tearfully said:
"They're dead as hell, you see."

— Have you felt the spell of the silence that fell
on a tempest threatened sea
Like the hush of death, ere the icy breath of the
storm had broken free?
Have you known a fear that seemed to sear, till it
laid your whole soul bare,
And gripped in a spell that seemed to foretell of
impending dangers there?

Then you understand how a silence can brand, and
how it got me, that day,
And palled me with dread, like a place of the dead,
ere the old man turned to say:
"It's not the sin sodden, nightly trodden path
I've stumbled in,
Nor the hellish grave my youth I gave, in the
slimy slough of sin.

"It's not the shame of the harlot's game, nor the
years that iniquity cost,
That brings the sadness and blinding madness, for
I staked — and played — and lost.

Those scores are all paid — for the woman has
laid me away in the flesh here to rot,
And left of a man, what a living death can, and I
know I deserve what I got.

"What's burning my soul, like a fiery coal, and
making the past such a hurt,
Is to die face to face with the damning disgrace of
a soldier who'd go and desert."
From a coverlet fold, a sack of gold then, he drew,
and held to me;
"A little gift from the miner's shift" he said, "and
the company.

"Will you take it, please, across the seas, before
it — is — too late?
And buy the discharge — of Peter Conarge —
deserter — in — 'Seventy-eight.' "
Then he loosened his hold on the bag of gold, and
clutched at the flag o'er his head,
And he struggled to speak — but his voice grew
weak — then I looked — and the man was
dead.

FLAHERTY'S GHOST

Flaherty died o' fever, at the close of an Eastern day.
Died aboard the tramp "Eliza," in the gulf o' Sibuguey.
Flaherty died o' fever, an' we shuffled the cards an' drew
To see who'd bury Flaherty — from out the Irish crew.
Flaherty made but one request before he died, sez he:
"Now mind ye put me in a box, whiniver ye bury me."
The divil a bit fer a corpse agin, we'd put on lugs at sea,
But whin Flaherty died, the crew all agreed they'd treat him respectfully.
So the tramp hove to, an' the lots they fell to the second mate an' meself.
A box we made an' laid him in, an' we built fer his head a shelf;
Lashed to his feet a grate bar or two, to steady him on his ride,
Nailed him tight, an' swung him clear, an' lowered him over the side;

Eased him down where the dingy lay, an' we handled him tenderly —
An' we pulled away: The mate, McVey, meself, an' Flaherty.

The moon came out o' the rollin' sea, as big as a capstan head,
The oar locks creaked, an' the trade winds moaned an' the mate he looked at the dead.
We rose on the breast of a ground sea swell, fer we neared Illana Bay;
"'Tis no place here to bury the dead, four fathoms sheer away,
We need," sez I, an' we dared not wait fer the drift of the changin' tide.
So we out in the teeth of a nor'east trade, where the deep sea billows ride.
We rolled in the trough of a rough beam sea — an' our flesh began to creep
As we looked at the load — but with nivver a word, we tumbled it into the deep.
A bit of a splash wuz all that we heard — an' the coffin sank from sight;
The low winds sighed, an' we pulled away, into the sea locked night.

"He's down to stay," sez the second mate, as he heaved a sigh at me.
Sez I: "'Tis so, an' it's sure good-bye to poor old Flaherty."

Now the mate wuz nivver a brave man at all, an' he pulled a shaky stroke
As he gazed astern, an' the moon shone full on his face — but he nivver spoke,
Till o' sudden he stiffened, an' dropped his oars, an' he stared like a man insane:
"Saints above us, Mike," sez he, "He's comin' back again!"
I looked, a' sure he wuz doin' that same — an' it didn't look good to me —
Fer bolt upright on a followin' sea, bobbin', wuz Flaherty!
The mate he prayed, an' the seas came in, fer we rode to a floodin' tide —
I thought o' me home in the County o' Clare — then looked to the starb'd side,
An' there, hard by, in a bight o' the seas, so close I could nigh leap the space,
Wuz Flaherty's coffin, the lid busted through, an' from it stuck Flaherty's face!

Now the mate he wuz nivver a brave man at all, an' as fer meself — nivver mind;
'T was a case of meself an' the mate, ye can see — or Flaherty, comin' behind;
Fer the passin' looked bad, without shiftin' our course—an' Flaherty wuz set in his ways—
So a boat hook I snatched, an' whin Flaherty passed, I lammed him a couple, midways. . . .

'Twas the last of Flaherty, but I swear to this day,
whin we shuffle the cards fer the deal,
The mate he turns pale, an' he speaks not a word,
but gazes away out to sea—
An' the crew all allows that he thinks o' the night
whin we buried Flaherty.

HOMEWARD BOUND

We're leaving the East.
  Do you know what it means?
Have you known it, adored it,
  And drunk in its scenes;
Cursed it, abhorred it —
  Yet played it to win?
This land steeped in beauty,
  And reeking with sin,
Where your conscience creeps out,
  And the devil creeps in,
When the spell o' the East
  Gets under your skin.
Have you sought it — then thought it
  The worst in the world?
In its maelstrom of gayety,
  Dizzily whirled,
Have you fought it? to thwart it
  You tried? Then, outwitted,
And — drunk with the ecstasy
  Of it — submitted?
Merciful East!
  Oh, the balm in thy stings!
Oh, the sweet lethargy
  That thy bitterness brings!
Land of rare beauty

From near, and afar;
From the white snows of Fuji
To the white harbor bar.
Where the cherry bloom petals
O'er the pathways are strewn,
The rice fields are waving,
And, soft, comes the croon
Of the wind in the pine trees
Afar on the hill;
The chimes in the temples
Never are still.
The chant at the altars
Is ceaseless, and low,
As the silent celestials
Pass to and fro.
Land of the Jap,
And the pig-eyed Chinee,
Of heathen tradition
And weird fantasy;
Idols, and shrines,
And grinning brass gods
(By Buddha approved
With omnipotent nods).
For the Evil One, dragons
Reach out with their claws,
Spitting javelins of flame
From their hideous maws.
Land where the germs
Of the cholera lurk,

And pestilence thrives
  In the filth and the murk;
Where men's skill and cunning
  Are matched in the mart;
Like the three-piece-ie dollar,
  Deceit is their art.
Here, the oldest of temples,
  The sacredest shrines,
Sensuous women,
  And choicest of wines.
Oft, we've watched the sleek liners
  Creeping eastward to sea,
Their steel hearts, with indifference,
  Throbbing lazily.
Full heavy, our hearts,
  As they wended their way
To the land we'd return to,
  God willing, some day.
We've been here three years,
  And it seems fully ten.
We're wise for coming —
  We may come again.
O land, where traditions
  Of dead dynasties ring!
'Round thy crumbling temples
  Fond memories cling.
We're leaving this fair land
  Of rickshaws, and things,
Land where the almond-eyed

Geisha girl sings.
Going back to God's country
Where the code is the same
For the morals of padre,
Or demi-monde dame.
Where the passions of men
Speak less of the beast,
And their honor, far-reaching,
As West is from East.

Ere the sun's o'er the fore-yard
We'll be on our way.
We're flyin' the homeward
Bound pennant today.

THE CALL OF THE SEA

Have you ever stood on a lonely shore beside the
restless sea,
With only the sound of the breakers' roar, and
your thoughts, for company?
Have you watched the billows rise and swell, till
their crests were tipped with spray?
Have you felt the silence before they fell, seen the
them quiver and totter and sway,
Poised like a bird, its pinions lashing, in vain, the
tempest to soar;
And then in a crashing, plunging, dashing column
advancing o'er
Their prostrate ones, where the swift ebb runs,
heard them break with a mighty roar
And a rumble like booming of distant guns echoed
along the shore?

Have you gazed seaward till your eyes were dim
and your rapture knew no bond,
Watched the twilight shades on the purple rim,
and wondered what's beyond?
Have you stood alone in God's great room, when
the sunset was tinting each wall,
Was your soul too narrow to quite consume the
splendor of it all?

Were you awed by the grandeur, borne upward
until heaven seemed nearer to you —
Did the vastness, the farness of God's nature
thrill, till it got you, through and through?
Have you lingered at night on a friendly shore,
lost in some fond reverie,
Heard a voice through the din of the breakers'
roar? Friend, that was the call of the sea!

Have you mused o'er the waves and tried to peer
through, pondered the silence they gave,
Gasped at the thought of the depths they lead to,
where millions have found a grave?
Did you think of the treasure and secrets they
hold, those fathoms of darkness below,
Of the wealth of the nations, more precious than
gold, that has gone there — and is to go?
Have you seen the grace of the gull on the wing,
as he poised on a foamy crest,
Heard the petrel's cry, seen the bosun-bird swing
through the heavens with never a rest?
Have you watched the winged denizens leap, or
the porpoises diving at play,
Through the mist the red orb of the sun sink to
sleep, and the redder one rise at day?

Have you studied the fleecy, breeze driven clouds,
as they hung o'er a summer sea,

Seen them rift and drift, like silken shrouds of
shim'ring transparency?
Do you know the scowling nimbus head, or the
sign of the mackerel sky,
Have you watched the waves where the shadows
sped, as the gathering clouds rolled by?
Seen the white caps play 'neath a cloudless sky,
and sport their emerald hue,
Seen the darkening waves, when the clouds drew
nigh, reflect their deepest blue?
Heard the tempest howl, seen the heavens scowl,
and the sea grow inky black,
The clouds hurl javelins of flame, with a growl,
and the mad waves hurl them back?

Have you sighed for these voices of nature again,
have you longed for the wild of the sea,
From the centres of toil and the haunts of men,
has your fettered soul strained to be free?
Has the wanderlust harnessed your guiding star,
is there a yearning for somewhere to be,
A restless desire for lands ocean far? You know,
then, the call of the sea.

SERGEANT REILLY

The "Prince," that's what they called him;
Pat Reilly was his name;
The whitest little sergeant, Jim,
In all the fightin' game.
His heart was where the chevron
Of another man 'u'd be,
An' always kind o' shinin' on
His whole company.

I'll tell ye they're not makin' men
Like Sergeant Reilly now;
An', Jim, as sure as shootin', when
We've had our last pow-wow,
An' Gabri'l sounds the last assembly
For good marines to fall
In with their comrades, you will see
Pat Reilly lead 'em all.

But I wuz goin' to tell ye, Jim,
(Confound it, boy, my eyes
Are waterin' so), — the thoughts o' him
They jest make somethin' rise
Up here, and kind o' choke me; well,
You've heard o' San Juan hill,
An' how the army give 'em hell
Fer an' hour or two until

The navy guns, from down the bay,
  Were p'inted up the banks,
An' how the army won the day
  With jackies on their flanks?
Well, I was campin' down that way,
  An', Jim, I'll tell ye right,
The only hell I saw that day
  Was Sergeant Reilly's fight.

We were ordered up to fill
  The gaps the Spaniards made;
We flanked the left, and charged the hill
  With Shafter's main brigade.
The shot an' shell began to pour
  From block-house and from trenches;
The shrapnel 'round us burst an' tore,
  The air was full o' stenches.

Shafter's men were droppin' fast;
  The hill got rough and steeper;
An' every charge we made, we passed
  The dead a-pilin' deeper.
I saw the Cap'n fall, an' then
  The First Lieutenant followed;
The fire was witherin' our men,
  The ranks were thin an' hollered.

They waited for the word again,
  Their blood up for repeatin'

The charge, when, Jim, my God! our men,
Yes, Jim, they wuz retreatin'!
Then I heard on awful yell,
An' saw a flag a-wavin';
An' in that avalanche o' hell
An' din o' groans an' ravin',

Was Sergeant Reilly wavin' toward
The scattered ranks, our pennant,
An' in his hand he held the sword
Of our First Lieutenant.
He beckoned, yelled, then leaped an' stood
Above us like a child.
We rallied — as he knew we would —
An' then, by God! he smiled.

The guns were meltin' Shafter's men,
Like sunshine melts the dew.
They charged an' fell, an' charged again,
An' each time left a few.
They tried to reach the foot-hill trench,
They fought for hill-side lee;
Their musketry had failed to quench
The block-house battery.

We follered Reilly where he led,
We climbed the rugged reach;
Our comrades fell, and over dead
We crept into the breach.

Higher! Higher! Up the grade
We drove the dusky devils,
From hole an' ditch an' ambuscade
We broke their hellish revels.

We led the regulars, at last,
The block-house loomed up nearer;
The snipers' haunts were clearin' fast,
Their game was gettin' dearer.
In open ranks we gained the hill,
We stormed that shack o' death,
An' charged the swarmin' hive until
We felt the guns' hot breath.

We poured the lead like all hell fire
Through port hole, chink an' door;
We dropped, an' on our bellies higher
Crawled, an' give 'em more.
The order came to charge again
(I can hear it ringin' yet).
Sergeant Reilly faced his men
An' every beggar met

That kind o' look we knew so well,
That made men want t' die
For him. (Why, we'd 'a' charged through hell
An' never questioned why.)
An' when he leaped ahead a pace
An' stood there, without cover,

A soldier's smile upon his face,
  As calm as any lover,

The air so full o' smoke an' shells
  — It seemed like they would blind us —
You should 'a' heard the cheers an' yells
  From Shafter's men behind us.
God! but how we fought 'em back,
  The block-house was surrounded,
An' roof, an' floor, an' shrapnel crack
  Were stuffed with dead an' wounded.

One battery yet was speakin' loud
  An' our front ranks were pourin'
Metal fast, but through the cloud
  O' smoke she kept on roarin'.
Then Reilly spied the block-house door,
  All sort o' cracked, an' burnin',
An' with a score o' men or more
  He charged! An' then a-turnin'

(Yes, Jim, I recollect it well),
  His face grew ghastly white,
An', then, he crumpled up an' fell:
  My God! Jim, what a sight!
Well, I guess that's 'bout all, Jim,
  'Cept I was by his side
Before the boys had hardly missed him
  — An' in my arms he died.

O' course, the army won the day,
'Cause when the sergeant fell
Our boys, like yaller hounds at bay,
Jest turned an' run like hell.
Then Shafter's men came on the run
An' charged the block-house door;
O' course they silenced *that one* gun,
An', well — there wa'n't no more!

I jest thought I'd tell ye, Jim,
How Sergeant Reilly died.
(There, son, my old eyes are dim
Again) I s'pose it's pride
That comes o' servin' (seems to me)
A man that's white clean through,
'N' on judgment day, Jim, I hope we
Can tell him so, — don't you?

TO AN ALBATROSS

O winged oracle of the seas,
Seer of the Antipodes!
Nestling where the crests of spray
Kiss your wings of pearly gray,
And your breast of snowy white —
Half at rest, half in flight,
As I watch you out at sea.
Queen of birds, you seem to me,
As you poise and wheel, and toss
On the waves, O Albatross!

Fairest of the conjurers
You have been to mariners.
Mistress of their destinies;
Fate and fortune on the seas.
Prophet, sage, in you they ken,
As you hover over men
Born in superstition's grip,
Reared in romance of the ship,
Taught to fear and love the sea —
Mandates of heredity.
Denizens of nature's wild,
Simple as the faith of child,
Trusting God, the winds and tide,
And the sun and stars to guide.

Fearless of the worst at sea —
Fearful of all mystery.
Creatures of the stranger moods,
Servants of the latitudes,
By the aid of nature's forces
Shaping their uncertain courses;
Harnessing the elements,
By them linking continents.
So the seamen live and die,
Knowing not a human tie —
Knowing not a faith or creed —
Pledging not a word or deed —
Stronger than their loyalty
To the service of the sea.

Students of the greater school,
Learning by the sterner rule
Of experience — and God
Suffers not to spare the rod,
In His flogging room, the woe
Of the tempest's wrath, they know.
Well they know the awful cost,
When their barks are tempest tossed,
Of a weakened yard, or stay.
Well they ponder on the way
Stormy petrels take their flight,
Or the falling mist at night.
As they heed the mackerel sky,
So they watch the sea birds fly.

In the petrel's low unrest —
Like the cloud bank in the west —
In the sea gull's carrion greed,
Messages the seamen read,
Of the nearness of the storm,
Or, the floating corpse's form.
But *your* flight is one of weal,
When your gray wings flash and wheel
O'er the ocean's misty hem,
Just your coming means to them
Omen of fair winds, to cross
Their troubled course, O Albatross!

GRUB

Y' can soldier in a training camp
  Fer ninety days er so;
An' hike until y' get a cramp
  In every bloomin' toe;
Y' can curry down th' hosses,
  Carry slops, er dig a trench;
Mind a dozen cook tent bosses,
  Spread a mess er scrub a bench:
Y' can sleep without complainin'
  With a bunkie that's a dub;
March in sun, er when it's rainin',
  But ye must have grub!
Grub!
Grub!

Y' can board an Army transport,
  With a couple thousand guys;
Throw a front an' be a sport —
  Chew tobacker an' look wise;
Y' can roll up in yer blankit
  Somewheres on th' upper deck,
Till ye feel a deck hand yank it
  Off, an' souse ye in th' neck;

Y' can stand at drill, er quarters
When she's rollin' like a tub,
Till yer green as shaller waters —
Then ye won't want grub!
Grub!
Grub!

THE BALANCE

What matters who you were back there —
What wealth was yours, or mine —
If hailed, well met, at club affair,
Or where you went to dine.

What gain that you the gods endow,
Or me they scorn to meet;
Life's red inked entries tally now,
On war's great balance sheet.

What good that you were grubbing ore
Where social strata ran;
Your rifle pit now reeks with gore,
And you're a fighting man.

What matters you're a thoroughbred,
When we're knee deep in mud —
With shrapnel screaming overhead —
Can blood be more than blood?

You're only one of the boys, out here,
— Can never this law defy —
You've an equal chance for all that's dear,
And an equal chance to die.

THE ROOKIE

When you are a rookie, an' most o' the crew
Are natcherly makin' a goat out o' you;
The ship is unsteady — an' you are too sick
To turn to an' swing up your bloomin' hammick—
Jest break out a blanket an' roll up on deck —
Don't mind if some lubber does step on your neck —
You've joined the outfit, so show 'em your grit;
Buck up an' be happy — you're doin' your bit.

When letters from home are all trembly an' blue,
An' matters back there are discouraging you;
When the pages are blurred, for the tears in the way,
Jest up with your neck'ch'f an' brush 'em away,
Then roll up th' makin's — forget what has been —
An' mosey up for'ard where th' gang is, an' grin.
You're only a rookie, but shoulder your kit;
Buck up an' be happy — you're doin' your bit.

If your ship is torpedoed an' sinks like a lead,
An' half the crew's wounded — the other half dead —

You're all shot to pieces, an' somewhere in France
You're laid up in bed, an' your life is all chance,
Why, think of the glory of *jest bein' there!*
Your shattered old leg it will do for a pair —
— An' you were in range, or you wouldn't a' got hit —
So, buck up — be happy — you're doin' your bit.

THE MEN OF THE SEA

Have you felt the appeal, seen life in the real,
Of the men who people the seas?
Have you thought as they think, felt what they
feel,
Touched elbows with such men as these?

Big hearted and sturdy, simple and true,
Toil calloused, carefree and brave;
Full chested, red blooded — these men who do
And dare, in the life on the wave.

Have you stood on the bridge with the watches
at night?
Have you taken a trick at the wheel?
Have you hungered, and frozen? Been stabbed in
a fight?
You know, then, the things that they feel.

Do you know the plight, on a storm ridden night,
Of the lonely mid-watch at the helm?
Gulped in the blackness, and bludgeoned with
fright —
Lost in a tempest torn realm?

With oilskins wrapped to his shivering form,
Stiff with the sleet and the snow;
Lashed by the flail of the biting storm,
And the cold, when it's twenty below.

Alone with the sea, in a hell of its own,
Crouching for lee where he can;
Blinded, and chilled clean through to the bone —
God! But it takes a man.

THE LURE OF THE EAST

This is the spell of the Orient —
The lure of the far, far East,
A lure that is soft and luxuriant —
A bidding to sate of a feast
That is spread with the viands of pleasure,
Replenished again and again.
And music, each sensuous measure
Attuned to the passions of men.
In a land where little is given —
Where the game is to buy and to sell.
In a land with the virtues of Heaven —
A land with the sinning of hell.

You come to the East with a conscience
And the failures of others to guide.
For a while you are upright and honest —
And God only knows how you tried.
Striving at first to be decent —
Fighting, and losing the fight.
Taking a drink to be social —
Hitting it up for the night.
Then you fall, like the other poor devils —
Succumb with a grace to your fate.
It's the spell of the East that has got you,
As it gets them all, soon or late.

It's the lure of the fly to the grayling —
Gaudy, and brilliant hued;
But men are the fools who are trailing —
And Satan is casting the food.
It's the call of the quail in the cover —
The lure of the flame to the moth.
The call of the thrush for its lover —
The call of the mate to betroth.
Softly at first it steals o'er you —
Dreamy and sweet, like a breath
Of incense or sandal, o'erwhelming
Your senses, and silent as death.
Till the air grows heavy with perfume —
You're happy, without and within,
Little you care for what may be —
And less for what might have been.

The blissful siesta at midday —
The drive, in the late afternoon.
And then for the nightly revel —
Women, and wine, and the moon.
The feasting, the music, the dancing —
The clandestine moments between.
The sweet-scented gardens enhancing
A flight from the ball-room scene.
White shoulders agleam in the moonlight,
A form that is truly divine.
Eyes with the dull glow of passion —
Tongues that are loosened by wine.

The clinking of glasses, and pledges
Sealed with a kiss of champagne.
Rollicking songs and laughter —
A speech from a reeling brain.

Women as fair as a lily —
Hair that glistens and glows.
Skin with the softness of velvet,
And white as Fuji's snows.
Lips with the blush of roses,
Eyes that sparkle with wine.
The perfume of blown cherry blossoms,
And flowered wistaria vine.
But the roses will fade in the morning,
When the rouge and the powder are gone;
The eyes will cease to be sparkling —
The cheeks will be pale and wan.

* * * *

You are down in the native quarter
Taking a last little fling,
Where the samisens creak their weird melodies,
And the geisha girls dance and sing.
The stars are reeling and dancing,
And love is afloat on the breeze.
Virtue is drowned in a bumper —
And care in the seven seas.
The tropical moon is a bibber —
And he's not the only one.

The bubbles of life are bursting —
— And the night is not half begun.

* * * *

Alone in your ricksha at day-break —
Remorseful, and bitter with hate.
Back to your ship, or your barracks —
Going on duty at eight.

— And so the night's revel is ended —
And all of the nights are the same.
Some are more hellish than others,
But none of the nights are tame.
Thus it has been from beginning —
Thus will it be to the end.
A power that draws men to sinning —
A force that will crush, and will rend.
A lure that is soft and luxuriant —
A bidding to sate of a feast.
This is the spell of the Orient —
The lure of the far, far East.

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